

Philippians 2:1-4 (NIV)

1 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

To gain an understanding of today's passage we have to look back to chapter one and remind ourselves that Paul speaks about being united with or alive in Christ, and how our conduct should be worthy of the gospel. Knowing this helps us understand the beginning of chapter two. The word, "therefore" points us to how we should respond to being united with Christ.

The fourfold repetition of **if** and **any** in the first verse is used in two ways. It is used to remind you of what you have experienced through being united with Christ and then to respond to this experience with four motives for action.

First, "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ," motivates us to remain steadfast, firm, without wavering, because we are connected to Christ through faith and he will not leave us nor forsake us.

Second, "if any comfort from his love," should remind you that Christ's love for you was shown in his death on the cross for your sins. John 15:13 says, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." The love you have experienced from Christ should be a powerful incentive for action.

Third, "If any common sharing in the Spirit," points to the fellowship and participation of the Spirit active in your life and also in the fellowship of believers together. The experience and awareness of the Spirit at work in you and in the gathering of believers should motivate you to action.

Fourth, "If any tenderness and compassion." Other translations use affection and sympathy, and mercy. This is when your hearts have been touched and you become open and responsive to the needs of others and your actions are motivated by compassion.

In verse one we had the "ifs", now in verse two we have the "then". This is a classic way of communicating in scripture. Here is a good example, John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask whatever you desire, and it shall be done for you." It is a conditional statement that declares, if I do this, then this will be the result.

Listen to verse two, ***“then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”*** Paul now gives a response to the “If” in verse one that demonstrates how what you have experienced in being united with Christ is to be put into action. Again there are action points.

First, Paul will be filled with joy if the actions he mentioned are fulfilled. Second, he wants them to be like-minded, which means to literally contemplate the same thing. The focus of this like-mindedness is upon our faith and calling to follow Christ to the glory of God. Third, having the same love. This is the love for God and Jesus, which will also be shown in our love for one another. Fourth, one in spirit and of one mind, is literally together in soul thinking the same thing.

In verse 3 it says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” It is very damaging to when our attitude is selfish ambition, which strive to get ahead and be on top. I’ve known ministers who wanted to become pastors of large church, so they work tirelessly to achieve the goal, but found themselves disappointed when they achieve it. All because their motives and the intent of their heart was wrong. Vain conceit is believing that you are better than others and leads to an attitude of looking down on people.

The attitude we are meant to have is one of humility that values others above self. If we value others then we become thankful for them and we are able to fulfil the verse four. It concludes verse 3, “not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” This is all about loving and caring for one another. If we only look after our own interests, we become selfish. To look after the interests of others is a sign of our love and care, but doesn’t mean that we forget our own interests. It becomes a matter of a balance between the two.

All that Paul is saying is instructs us in how we should live as follows of Christ. It leads us to become a people who show Christ in our lives and brings glory to God.